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# **The Falkland Islands and Dependencies**

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A Geographical Reference Aid

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# The Falkland Islands and Dependencies

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## A Geographic Reference Aid

*Information available as of 7 April 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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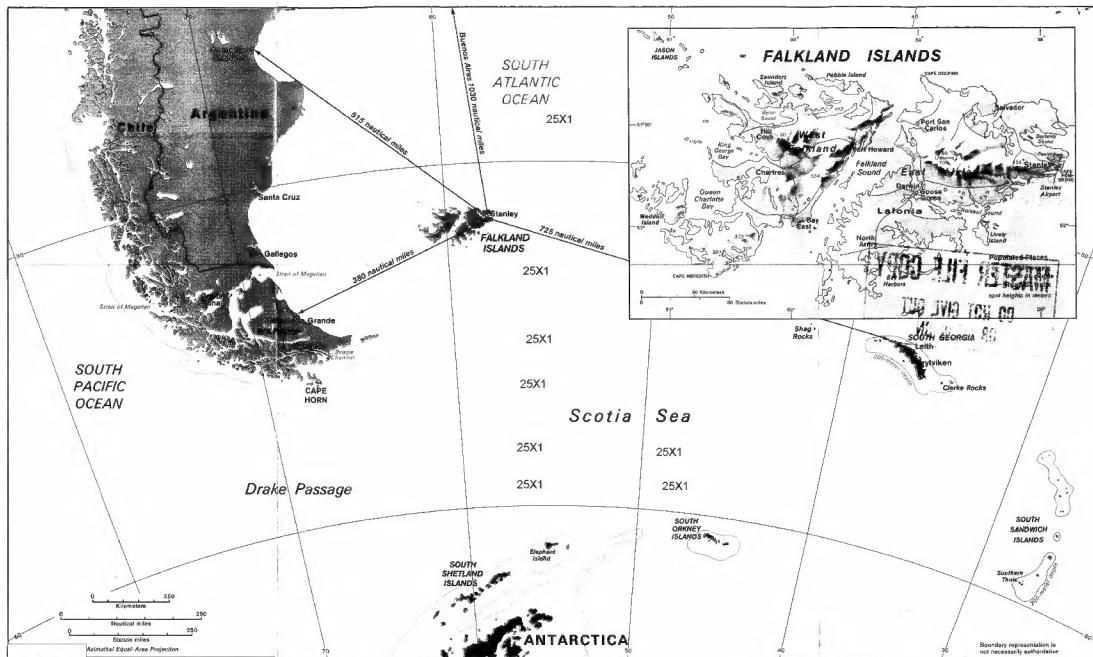
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## The Falkland Islands and Dependencies

The Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands focused world attention on a remote and little known region of South America. The Long government, however, had been claiming by Argentine title since 1820. The islands are located almost 3,000 nautical miles off the tip of South America—and more than 8,600 nautical miles from the United Kingdom, Argentina, seeing itself as the inheritor of early Spanish claims, has long asserted its rights to sovereignty over the islands. Some scholars believe that the first European to sight the islands was Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese navigators who may have discovered the Falklands. The British, who visited the islands as early as 1592, recognize neither Spanish nor Argentine claims to the territory. They permanently established the Falklands in 1833 and have consistently governed the islands ever since that time. The strategic significance of the Falklands has waxed and waned through the years. During the period of early settlement, the islands were considered important as a resupply point for ships rounding Cape Horn, but with the opening of the Panama Canal they became less so. British ships continued to use the port of Stanley as a coaling station, however, and the islands played a key role in control of the South Atlantic and operations against the German Navy in both world wars.

National pride and historical claims to sovereignty aside, there remain several reasons for continued British interest in the islands. Principal among these is the recent speculation about offshore oil. Of lesser significance is the maintenance of a strategic position near the South Atlantic shipping lanes. Sovereignty over the islands also has a bearing on certain ocean resource claims, and the islands could play a role in support of future scientific investigations as Antarctic resources become more significant.

This paper describes geographic features of the islands that are pertinent to the current crisis and to potential military operations. It deals with the Falkland Islands proper and also, more briefly, with South Georgia and the South Shetland Islands.



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## The Falkland Islands

The Falklands consist of two large islands and about 200 smaller ones with a total area of approximately 12,000 square kilometers (somewhat smaller than Connecticut). The two principal islands, East and West Falkland, are separated by Falkland Sound, which is 3 kilometers across at its narrowest point and about 40 kilometers across at its widest. The coastlines of the islands are very irregular and include

many good anchorages; the best are Berkeley Sound, site of the original British settlement, and Port Williams at the entrance to Stanley Harbour.

East Falkland is almost cut in half by sounds. The northern portion of the island is dominated by a rugged east-west range of hills, which, in Mount Usinger—the highest peak in the island—attains a maximum elevation of 7000 feet. The southern portion, known as Lafonia, is an undulating plain with elevations rarely exceeding 30 metres above sea level. West Falkland is more hilly than its neighbour. A range of hills occupies the northern part of the island and extends southward, ending in a series of low ridges 7000 feet. These hills and mountains are covered with thin layers of soil broken by rocky outcrops, and many of the valleys are characterized by stone "runns"—accumulations of closely packed boulders that lie like rivers of stone flowing to the

places.

Argentine and British Place Names	
Isla Malvinas	Falkland Islands
Bahía de los Abrigos	Bay of Harbours
Bahía de la Anunciación	Berkeley Sound
Bahía del Desembarco	Adventure Bay
Bahía San Julian	Queen Charlotte Bay
Cabo Belgrano	Cape Meredith
Cabo Leal	Cape Dolphin
Cabo San Felipe	Cape Pembroke
Isla de la Soledad	Lively Bay
Isla de los Pájaros	Pebble Island
Isla de los Témpanos	West Falkland
Isla Graciosa	Weddell Island
Isla San José	South Georgia
Isla San Pedro	Inaccessible Islands
Isla Soledad	East Falkland
Isla Trinidad	Saunders Island
Monte Alberdi	Mount Usborne
Monte Independencia	Mount Adam
Puerto Argentino	Stanley
Río Clerke	Clerke Rocks
Rocas Corales y Neeras	Shag Rocks

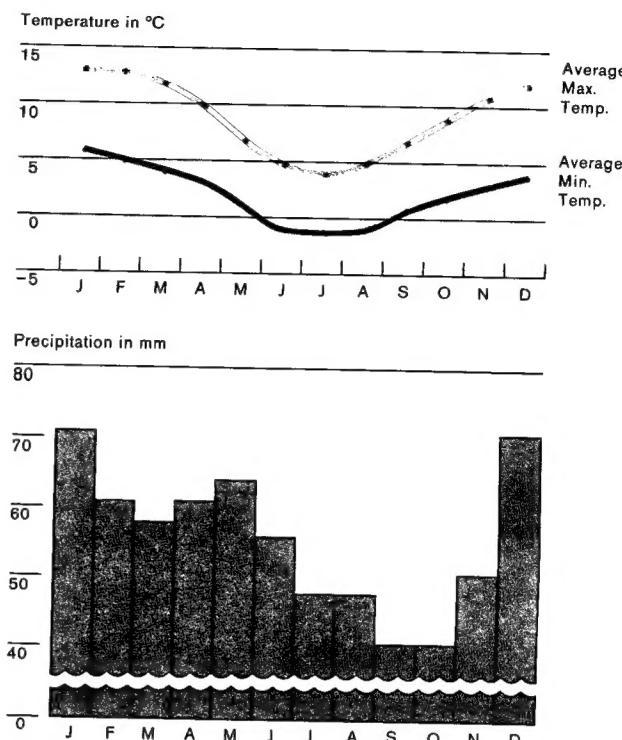
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**Climate.** In these bleak islands, strong, cold westerly winds prevail throughout the year. Stanley, the only place where long-term meteorological records have been kept, receives an annual precipitation of about 670 mm (26 inches). Skies are usually cloudy and humidity is invariably high; precipitation occurs on more than half the days of every month of the year. Snow may fall during any month but even in winter does not remain on the ground for long periods. Average daily temperatures during July, the coldest month, range from  $-1^{\circ}$  to  $4^{\circ}$  Celsius; during January, the warmest month, the range is from  $6^{\circ}$  to  $13^{\circ}$  Celsius. Winds average more than 15 knots.

**Vegetation.** The natural vegetation, limited to grasses, heath, and small shrubs, offers little cover or concealment. Trees do not grow naturally in the cold, windy climate, and those that are planted usually die. Broad areas in the uplands are practically barren. The grasses are the single most important resource of the islands, as they provide pasturage for sheep. Peat, available in abundance, is dried and used as a heating fuel.

**Harbors, Beaches, and Landing Places.** Although the bays and inlets provide many safe anchorages, the only port for oceangoing vessels is at Stanley. Its protected harbor is entered via Port William, an anchorage suitable for ships of all draughts. Larger vessels are prevented from entering Stanley harbor by shallow depths and limited turning space; they must remain in Port William and transfer cargo by smaller craft. Many of the small settlements have jetties to serve the boats that ply back and forth to Stanley bringing in supplies and carrying out bales of wool for export.

### Climatic Indicators for Stanley



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**The People.** The total population of the Falkland Islands prior to the Argentine takeover was approximately 1,825. About 1,075 of the inhabitants lived in Stanley; the rest lived in some 30 or more settlements on East Falkland, West Falkland, and a dozen smaller islands. The native population is almost wholly British, many of Scottish origin. Working-age males

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predominate because of a net emigration of females and immigration of males between the ages of 15 and 64. Almost half the male population is employed in the sheep-farming industry. Labor shortages have been a critical problem, and contract labor has commonly been brought in from the United Kingdom [redacted]

Over the past 50 years the population has gradually declined from a high of about 2,400 in 1931, as many of the young people have sought opportunities elsewhere. The small settlements have suffered most of the decline; the population of Stanley has remained fairly stable. Living standards are good, and the inhabitants overwhelmingly favor retaining their ties to the United Kingdom. [redacted]

**Economy.** Sheep farming has long been the most important economic activity in the Falklands. Today there are more than 640,000 sheep on the islands. The wool, which is of high quality, is exported to the United Kingdom. Whales and seals were exploited extensively in and around the islands, particularly during the 19th century, but the last whaling station, on South Georgia, ceased operating in the early 1960s. In spite of the potentially good fishing grounds south and east of the islands, no commercial fishing industry has developed. A few people fish part-time to supplement their incomes and provide fish for local consumption [redacted]

There are no important mineral resources on the Falkland Islands proper, but there has been much speculation about petroleum deposits offshore between the islands and the Argentine coast. The most recent geophysical information does not support optimism that these deposits are of great economic importance. Significant finds might still be made, but commercial development would be difficult and expensive because of the unfavorable operating conditions. [redacted]

#### The Dependencies

The Dependencies of the Falkland Islands include South Georgia, the South Sandwich Islands, Shag Rocks, Clerke Rocks, and several other scattered rocks and islets. A cold, inhospitable climate and a lack of natural resources discourage habitation. Scientific stations are the only permanent settlements in the Dependencies. [redacted]

South Georgia, the largest island of the Dependencies, is located 725 nautical miles east-southeast of the Falkland Islands. Rugged and mountainous, with elevations as high as 2,934 meters, it is covered entirely by snow and glaciers much of the year. In summer (December-February) the snow line may rise

to 450 meters. Vegetation on the island consists of a few species of grasses, lichens, and mosses; the only land mammals are reindeer, introduced in the early part of this century, which now number about 2,000. The irregular, deeply indented coast provides many safe anchorages, and the island once had whaling stations at Leith, Grytviken, and several other sites. The stations have fallen into disuse with the decline of whaling activities in the region and the development of whaling factory ships. A British scientific station at Grytviken, the only permanently inhabited place on the island, was captured by Argentine forces on 3 April. [redacted]

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The South Sandwich Islands are a string of rugged, steep-sided, volcanic islands lying about 350 nautical miles southeast of South Georgia. Unlike South Georgia, this group includes few anchorages, and most of the places that are suitable for landing are subject to continuing volcanic activity. In 1976 Argentina set up a scientific base on Southern Thule, the southernmost island of the chain. British protests resulted in a mutual agreement that Argentine scientific activity in the area had no sovereignty implications. [redacted]

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The South Shetland Islands, South Orkney Islands, and other lands within the British-claimed sector of the Antarctic were separated from the Falkland Island Dependencies in 1962 and are now administered as the British Antarctic Territory. [redacted]

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#### Other Jurisdictional Implications

Besides the question of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands themselves, occupation of the islands has implications for jurisdictional claims over ocean resources in a broad region around the Falklands and in Antarctica. At stake are some potentially good fishing grounds that fall within the 200-mile economic zones around the islands, and the resources of the wide continental shelf on which the islands are located. The Argentines believe that their claims in Antarctica, which overlap those of the United Kingdom, are reinforced by possession of territory immediately to the north. [redacted]

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The long dispute between Argentina and Chile over sovereignty issues in the area of the Beagle Channel may also be strongly affected by the outcome of the current crisis in the Falklands. The success of Argentina's invasion of the Falklands may tempt it to use military force rather than diplomacy to achieve its objectives in the Beagle Channel area. [redacted]

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## Falkland Islands Chronology <sup>1</sup>

- 1592** English navigator John Davis reaches the Falkland Islands.
- 1598** Sebald van Weert, a Dutch navigator, sails along the northern shore of the Falklands and probably visits some of the islands, perhaps the Jasons.
- 1690** Capt. John Strong makes the first recorded landing on the Falklands and names the sound between the two main islands "Fawkland Sound"—a name soon associated with the island group as a whole.
- 1764** Louis de Bougainville, sailing under a French flag, establishes a settlement on East Falkland.
- 1765** Capt. John Byron, sent out on a survey expedition, claims the islands for Great Britain and leaves a small party on Saunders Island.
- 1766** The French settlement on East Falkland is, under pressure, transferred to Spain.
- 1767** Spaniards raise flag on East Falkland; the French name for the islands, *Malouines*, is hispanicized on Spanish documents to *Islas Malvinas*.
- 1770** Spanish warships bombard the settlement on Saunders Island and force the British to abandon the islands. Spain maintains unbroken line of governors in Falklands from 1767 to 1810.
- 1810-20** Argentina gains independence from Spain and claims sovereignty over the Falklands; the first Argentine Government official is sent to the islands in 1820.
- 1828-31** Buenos Aires grants Louis Vernet, a Frenchman, certain rights over exploitation of resources on the island. Vernet seizes several US sealing vessels for alleged violations of fishing rights.
- 1831** US corvette Lexington lays waste to the Argentine settlement on East Falkland and proclaims the islands "free of all governance."
- 1833** Great Britain, which has never renounced its claims to sovereignty, sends warship Clio to retake islands. Argentine flag is lowered and long British rule commences.
- 1966** A group of Argentines, apparently acting without the approval of their government, attempt unsuccessfully to invade the islands. When they return to Argentina, they are greeted as heroes.
- 1982** Argentina invades the Falkland Islands.

<sup>1</sup> The historical record on which this chronology is based is incomplete and subject to dispute.  

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